



The 561st Support Bn constructed Victory Base, a compound in Somalia, for the armor forces sent by President Clinton after Oct. 3, 1993.

OOTW Support

561st Support Battalion Trains for Survivability

By CSM Cynthia Pritchett

We NCOs must seize the initiative and become more proactive, creative and forward-thinking in planning and conducting training.

I'm sure many of you have heard the saying, "We go to war the way we are today, not the way we want to be." As recent deployments show, there's little or no time for train-up.

OOTW made this a reality for some units. These deployments have added and will continue to add some unique challenges to our combat readiness.

As primary trainers for individual soldier tasks, we must understand what OOTW entails and how to train for them. The other critical piece is knowing and understanding the unit's mission, the commander's intent, the METL and its critical and collective tasks. This will assist NCOs in determining their soldiers' strengths and weaknesses.

We must look at our Army's recent deployments in selecting our training and incorporate lessons learned from OOTW in our day-to-day training.

Tasks and standards don't change, but the conditions in which we execute them do. Realizing this, we must apply the nine principles of training to our training plan. Our failure to consistently apply these training principles at home station stands out in OOTW.

Based on my experiences [as battalion CSM for the 561st Support Bn] in Somalia and looking at the situations and conditions from the soldiers' perspective there, we must become more aware of what OOTW involves and change our training conditions.

The soldiers' ability to execute their daily missions wasn't a major concern—their ability to survive was. I say this because I believe our training has become routine in most instances and especially at home station. It's not substandard, it's just predictable. To become accustomed to one or two scenarios breeds complacency.

Mission support in Somalia proved challenging, but manageable. Most of the day-to-day missions of the 561st Bn (Corps) encompassed hauling cargo, water and fuel; producing, storing and

issuing water; receiving, storing and issuing fuel; processing remains and providing engineer services.

What these soldiers accomplished in four months supports my claim that performing daily missions was of little concern. Executing these missions exposed soldiers to such dangers as convoy ambushes, sniper fire, mortar attacks, mined roads, large and riotous crowds, sabotage of fuel pipeline and water line and children armed with grenades and other explosives. Many of you will say this is nothing new. For the most part, I agree. However, the NCO Corps as a whole is losing its seasoned combat veterans of years past and as we rebuild this experience base, we will encounter some hard lessons we may have to re-learn.

The 561st was notified almost 75-80 days prior to actual departure. This allowed us to develop lane training to address training we needed to focus on. I attribute the battalion's successful lane training to our being proactive in obtaining information and lessons learned from units currently on the ground. *We geared almost all our training on survivability.* This additional training gave our soldiers added confidence. I measured our overall success by the fact that we deployed and redeployed over 1,100 soldiers without loss of life.

If we'd deployed without having had the opportunity to train-up, I'm not so certain we would've had the same success.

Our ability to apply what we've learned in OOTW is key to improving combat readiness for future real-world deployment and rotations through our Army's training centers. The training we conduct at home stations and the training centers is invaluable. We must now go that extra step by making it more challenging and realistic and by changing the conditions.

The ever-changing world in which we live requires—no, demands—that we NCOs understand and know what OOTW involves so that we may continue to take an active and aggressive role in determining and planning soldier training. ■

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